The Hiſtory of the Firſt Pariſh in Brookline

A Bi-centennial Sermon

By William H. Lyon, D.D.

THE HISTORY OF THE FIRST PARISH IN BROOKLINE

AS A MIRROR OF THE HISTORY OF THE TOWN

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE FIRST PARISH MEETING HOUSE, NOVEMBER 12, 1905, DURING THE CELEBRATION OF THE TWO HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INCORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF BROOKLINE

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FIRST PARISH IN BROOKLINE

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage."—GAL. v. 1.

FROM one point of view two hundred years does not seem so very long a time. The lives of Deacon Goddard and Mr. Poor, placed end to end, would have come within only eleven years of spanning it, and either of these venerable men might have talked with some one who had spoken with one of the incorporators of the town. But if we measure that time, not by the number of years, but by what has happened in it, we have a sense of distance and remoteness. Massachusetts was then an English province. Queen Anne had been three years on her throne. The English settlements were little more than a border to this great land, clinging to the ocean and looking backward at the vast stretch of mountain and forest with almost as much terror as men would under other circumstances cling to the shore and look back over the rolling waves of the ocean. The West of those days was the farther part of New York and Pennsylvania. About that mighty country which we now call the West,—Illinois, Minnesota and Kansas—our fathers knew little and cared less, provided only that the Indian and the Frenchman would stay there, and let honest folk alone. The West was a vast ocean of prairie

and forest, over and through which roamed great herds of bison and antelope. Through the midst of it, to quote Lincoln's thankful words after Vicksburg had been taken, "the Father of Waters rolled unvexed to the sea." As to Dakota and Oregon, California and Utah, they were as unknown to our fathers as they had been to the Romans.

But even what was known in 1705 was held very insecurely. It is strange to remember that even then, after Massachusetts had been settled three-quarters of a century, it was only very near the coast and in the larger towns that the people slept in peace. It was only the year before this town was incorporated that the Deerfield massacre took place and the Indians attacked Amesbury and Haverhill, from which the railroad now lands us in Boston in half an hour.

Quite as far away from our comfortable lives seem the poor homes of those days. No wonder that from half to two-thirds of the children born into them soon died, even in the families of the intelligent. Of Judge Sewall's fourteen but three survived him, most dying in infancy, of Cotton Mather's fifteen but two. No heat but from the fireplace, no light but from candles, no food but that of the farm itself, no oil, gas, electricity, telephone, telegraph, practically no books, newspapers, or even mail, no conveyance but stage coaches more ingenious in discomfort than in structure, few drugs for sickness, and those nauseous and powerful beyond belief, and no ether, chloroform or antiseptic in surgery, with doctors as full of superstitions as the ministers,—it is hard to say what they did have, except religion. Of that they had a

wonderful supply among conditions that would seem fatal to it.

Ministers have never had higher position or deeper respect than among our Puritan fathers. They were classed with the gentry. The first who came here were of the best in England. They were noted scholars even at the universities there, and it is due chiefly to them that we have the older colleges and our public school system. Here they stood for those things for which the colony came over. They were not only the advisers of their people, but the counsellors of the state, as the interpreters of that Bible from which divine direction in both private and public life was drawn. Warned off by the dread of Romanizing from officiating at weddings or funerals, they had in other ways a singular power. Indeed, there was often something princely in their bearing and state. The description which we have of the Rev. Dr. Charles Chauncy, minister of the First Church in Boston about this time, riding through the streets of that town in a two-wheeled chaise with very long shafts and a seat where our whiffle-tree commonly is, whereon sat a small negro boy to drive, the Doctor within, stiff, upright, stern and absent-minded, cocked hat upon head and gold-headed cane supporting his hands; or of a certain parson in New Hampshire, driving over the country roads in his cumbrous coach with a pair of stalwart horses, while the people stood aside in the bushes, bowing and curtseying as he and his not less magnificent consort rolled by; or the portraits of such divines, impressive in great white curled wigs and voluminous black

gowns with white bands falling from the throat; or the accounts of how all the congregation waited in their pews after service till the minister and his wife swept down the broad aisle and out of the front door,— these pictures of the old-time minister give us an idea of dignity not only granted to the profession, but highly relished by the individual.

The meeting-houses of the wealthier parishes were of the same stateliness. Opposite the door rose the pulpit, a three-story structure, sounding-board above, minister's place midway, and deacons' seat below. The pulpit was high enough to command the galleries which ran around the house, and, when occupied by the gowned and bewigged parson in all his glory, must have been an awe-inspiring affair. The meeting-house was "dignified," that is, the people were arranged according to "1st dignity of descent, 2d place of public trust; 3d pious disposition and behaviour; 4th estate; 5th peculiar serviceableness of any kind." In early days there was no choir, and the singing may be imagined when we read that in the Roxbury church, where our fathers went at first, sometimes one took breath two or three times in singing one note, and that Judge Sewall was mortified to set one tune and have the congregation slide over to another before the verse was finished, sometimes ending with a third.

How far these descriptions of the church life of that day apply to the Church of Christ in Brookline we have almost no way of knowing. There are no portraits of its first four ministers extant, nor any pictures of the first meeting-house. The "Poor Little Town," as its people

called it then, could hardly have indulged in the magnificence of the Boston churches. It shared with them the custom, however, of settling its ministers for life, and seems to have given them as generous support and as respectful treatment as was customary at that day. Like all other meeting houses, this had no fire, and no doubt the frozen communion bread rattled in the plates like that of which Judge Sewall tells us. Yet into these frigid buildings it was the custom to bring infants before they were a week old to be baptized. We can understand why, two years before this church was gathered, the legislature of Massachusetts felt compelled to pass a law that all able-bodied persons, who should unnecessarily absent themselves a month from public worship should be fined 20 shillings, or, if unable to pay the fine, be set in the cage or stocks, not exceeding three hours.

Since our church was not gathered for twelve years after the town was incorporated, we cannot, as many places can, celebrate the founding of its first church with that of the town. Yet we cannot let the early date of this parish pass unrecognized, or ignore the peculiar interest which it claims from being the oldest religious society in the town. I have chosen for my subject to-day, therefore, the First Parish in Brookline as illustrating in its history the times in which it has lived. We shall find that every important epoch, event, or change, in the province or state, in the town, or even in New England, has left its mark upon the First Parishes. To this rule the First Parish in Brookline is no exception. It was gathered too late to share the earliest events of New England history. The colonial period was over and the provincial

period had well begun before the town was incorporated. It missed, therefore, what was most characteristic of the Puritan régime in this country. We do not need to be reminded that our fathers came here, not only to obtain freedom to worship God, but also to found a new kind of state. Theirs was to be a community with the Bible for its constitution, the clergy for its counsellors, and only Christians for citizens. There was to be not merely an alliance of church and state, but the church was to be the state and the state the church. Only members of the church were to become voters and every voter, as every church member, must have been baptized, have passed through the spiritual crisis which was called conversion, and have been admitted to the church in due form.

It followed from this that since all citizens must be Christians and all Christians could be citizens, our fathers had to decide who were Christians. The lines were drawn more closely than those which have attracted so much attention of late, and since it was the life of the State as well as that of the Church that was to be regarded, the duty of drawing those lines was a very solemn one. Our fathers should be judged more kindly than some are disposed to regard them in an age when we need no longer to fear what they had to fear, and when the hard experiences through which they had just passed in the old country are dim with the haze of nearly three hundred years. They had a right to try their experiment, even only as an experiment, unhindered by the kind of people from whom they had fled across the sea. Many things which seem to us of little consequence, and which are

so in themselves, had dreadful meanings and ominous possibilities from their associations and their symbolism. Moreover, if the Puritans were stern, so were those who troubled them. If it seems abominable that our fathers treated the Quakers harshly, we must remember that the followers of George Fox were not the kindly and gentle folk they are to-day. When people insist in walking into your church on Sunday naked, and breaking symbolic bottles up your broad aisle, your patience is a virtue apt to be exhausted if you have crossed a perilous ocean and settled in a wilderness to worship in peace.

Moreover, the tempers of the Puritans were getting worn by the irresistible failure of their hopes. The ideal of Church and State would not work. What with strangers and with those who would not or could not be converted, the proportion of voters had been growing small and that of the non-voters had been growing large. What was worse, it could not fail to be seen that the unconverted were as good men as those who, sometimes with the very purpose of obtaining the right of suffrage, had been somewhat too ready to "experience a change of heart." The home government also had its ideas on the subject, and even the Half-Way Covenant, by which baptism alone, without conversion, admitted to the church, failed to satisfy the needs of the situation, and there was less regret in 1662 when Charles II abolished altogether the church qualification for suffrage than there would have been earlier. The fact was that the early ideal was growing dim. The children who grew up in the new land could not be like the fathers who had made the great sacrifice and had been sobered and strengthened by it,

while the immigrants who came in greater numbers as the new land was subdued and made attractive, were, of course, usually of quite another type. It is not strange that the sermons of the time grew melancholy and pessimistic, that the decline in church attendance was the subject of almost every election discourse, and that the gravest fears for the very continuance of the church and of religion filled the hearts of the faithful. At last came the revocation of the charter. Massachusetts no longer elected her own governor. The royal deputy took charge and, what was worse, the ecclesiastical power from which Winthrop had fled, claimed a place among those who knew from their fathers' experience what its rule could mean.

So opened the eighteenth century, in the first years of which this town received its corporate existence. From now on we watch the contemporary history in the mirror of the parish life.

Though Brookline was incorporated too late to have that alliance of Church and State which consisted in the church member being the only voter, it was in time for the established church. To our fathers the maintenance of religion seemed as proper a function of the town as the maintenance of education. In fact they would have said, as many are saying now, that the sharpening of the mind is worse than useless unless the moral character which is to direct the mind be trained also. To educate a bad man is to make his wickedness more dangerous. Hence the town built churches as well as school-houses, and maintained both by taxation of the citizens. And hence it was a stated condition of the in-

corporation of the town of Brookline that it should build a meeting-house and settle a minister within three years. Nine years passed before the house was built and twelve before the minister was settled, but both were subjects for the town meeting. The custom was for the church, or signers of the covenant, to elect the minister subject to the ratification of their choice by the town. His salary was fixed, his firewood provided, and his parsonage built, by the town meeting, which also decreed repairs on the two houses when they were needed, allotted space for pews, and generally assumed charge of the whole matter of religion. There was, says the record, "a Demurr . . . raised" at town meeting "Concerning the cost and manner of the Dinner that was Provided at the raising of the meeting House," but every one seemed to take it for granted that the erection of the building itself and the oversight of it and of the parson were proper subjects for public provision and support. The Parish was thus a mirror of all that remained,—and it was no small part,—of the Puritan ideal of the identity of Church and State. It is hard to believe that the time will not come around again when the sectarian separation so wasteful of consecration, energy, and expense will come to an end, and the community as such will provide for religion in both church and school as it does so generously for the education of the mind.

But even this remnant of the Puritan ideal could not stop the spread of liberal ideas as to the conduct of churches and the deepening religious indifference which set in as the Puritan rule relaxed. Probably each served both as cause and effect of the other. The eighteenth

century opened gloomily for the churches, even on the other side of the ocean. The Frenchman Montesquieu felt warranted in saying, as he travelled through England, that "there was no religion there, that in society it was laughed at, and that not more than four or five of the members of the House of Commons regularly went to church," and Addison himself admitted that there was less appearance of religion than in any neighboring state or kingdom. As to this country, five years before this town was incorporated, Increase Mather had said that "if the begun apostasy should proceed as fast the next thirty years as it has done these last, it will come to that in New England that churches must be gathered out of churches," and in the very year of the organization of the church here Thomas Prince, the historian, wrote that "there was scarce a prayer made in public without some lamentation of this decay." This lamentation had been rending the air for a long time. It had begun when the first generation of settlers had largely passed off the stage and with them the ideal and spirit which brought them here. We must allow something for the common tendency to believe that when we go the deluge will come, for our children whom we have tended and disciplined are always children to us and we find it hard to believe that the world will be safe in their hands. But there was, and had to be, much truth in the mournful description of the decline of religion, at least as represented by attendance at the churches.

We find this reflected in the sermons of our first minister, James Allen. "Is there not a scandalous neglect of the publick Worship upon the Lord's Day," he cried

on the Fast Day after the earthquake of 1727, "and has not the jealous God . . . been dreadfully testifying His abhorrence of such practices by the storm and by the earthquake on the Saturday and Sabbath evening?" And when the good man's turn came to preach the election sermon in Boston, he exhorted "the honourable Council and the honourable house of Representatives" to "a solemn regard for the Day, the house and worship of God," and to enforce the "good and wholesome laws provided to oblige all persons to attend the publick worship and to prevent unnecessary travels upon the Sabbath,"—laws, he bravely added, which "are every day trampled on, and in the open face of some in authority, and yet little or no notice is taken of them." To do Mr. Allen justice, he also laid the earthquake to "the sloth and negligence of the Ministers of Religion in their great work," and to their "hot and fierce debate about Sallaries." As to this latter point, however, justice should be done to the ministers by remembering that, small though the salaries were in those days, they were not always paid, and, when they were, it was in currency whose value in those fluctuating times was not always equal to human wants. John Cotton said that "ministers and milk were the only cheap things in New England," but even ministers could not live on milk alone.

This depressed condition of religion, however, was only the debilitating calm that often precedes a cyclone. Both in England and in the provinces there was soon to rise one of the wildest revivals in history. It began here in 1734 under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton and in England under Whitefield, who also

came here, and the Wesleys. In England it did immense good among the lower classes and radiated life into the Established Church itself. Here its effect was less evident. It roused strict Calvinism from the slumber into which it was quietly drooping, and made it stalk through a land which never realized till then how far it had forgotten and outgrown it. It therefore divided the New England churches into orthodox and liberal, and began a separation which widened at last into the lamentable Unitarian controversy. Excited self-appointed evangelists roamed through New England, accusing the respected pastors of the old churches of not being converted men themselves, and trying to get their parishioners out to form new and stricter societies. Little came of this but hard feeling on the part of respectable church-members and the later repentance and shame of the blatant and self-righteous wandering preachers. It bore heavily on many a sensitive spirit, and Mr. Allen is thought to have been killed by it. His published sermons show that he was of a liberal turn of mind. They certainly have little to say of such doctrines as Mr. Edwards preached, and what little they do say has an unreal and perfunctory sound, very different from the heartiness of his practical sermons. The very fact that the itinerant evangelists attacked him shows that he was not regarded as quite sound in the faith. In fact, in the sermons of himself and his short-lived son-in-law and successor, the Rev. Cotton Brown, we see evidence that the parish was already on its way to the position which it finally took in the great division of the churches at the beginning of the next century.

But even the influence of this mighty revival gradually sank from sight under the growing current of resentment against England, which gathered momentum every year as it rushed on to the cataract of the Revolution. Naturally we should look to the records of the town rather than to those of the parish for traces of this. The old book goes quietly on recording the recommendation of removing members to the churches of Brookfield, Sturbridge, Newton and other towns, or the appointment of delegates to attend the ordination of ministers over the churches of Watertown, Roxbury, Dorchester and so on. The minutes reflect rather that side of New England life which the histories of the time neglect, the quiet continuance of common life during those years of struggle and fate. At one point, however, the Parish touches the Revolution. The land which Mr. and Mrs. Edward Kitchen Wolcott gave to the town for a parsonage in 1787 was a part of an estate confiscated from a refugee Tory, bought by Mr. John Heath, and by him sold to Mrs. Wolcott.

The Congregational ministers of that day had much to do with rousing the patriotism of New England, all the more because, all the Episcopalian clergymen of the North as their own historian tells us, were "Tories." When Howe's fleet sailed away defeated from Boston, it took along eighteen ministers of that faith. It was no discredit to them,—quite the contrary. They stood for the Church of England and they ought to have been loyal to that Church and Crown. It has been one of the delights of this celebration, however, and perhaps one of its humorous aspects also, to see the successors of the

Puritan clergy sitting peacefully side by side with the successors of the Anglican clergy of 1705,—so far, indeed, as the successors of the Puritans were admitted to that pleasant companionship.

We have no sermons left from our minister at that time, but we cannot doubt that they reflected the great struggle and the preparation for it. The members of the Parish, however, appear in the records of the town as active and prominent. It was in front of the old meeting-house, on this side of the parsonage, that the three companies of Brookline men gathered to march across the field to Lexington. Isaac Gardner, who commanded one of them, was an active member of the Parish, and in 1773 is named three times as a delegate to ordinations. Thomas Aspinwall, who led another company and became later a Colonel in the Continental army, was also a member. So doubtless was Benjamin White, who commanded the third company. So was John Goddard, and a very active one, who was prominent in the town for several years before the Revolution broke out, upon every committee raised to represent the town in the measures which led to the war, and who managed that masterly moonlight march to Dorchester Heights which compelled the evacuation of Boston. John Goddard and Hannah, his remarkable wife, ought to have a memorial window in this church, where their direct descendants still worship; and Isaac Gardner should have another.

The Revolution, like all wars, brought wealth to the successful land. In the last ten years of the century, the population grew a third, and that of the West two-thirds, the centre of population, marvellous to relate,

moving so far as eighteen miles to the West of Baltimore. The exports rose from twenty to seventy millions and the imports from twenty-five to ninety millions. The cotton industry of New England began, and the cultivation of cotton in the South increased rapidly. The intellectual life of the people was almost stagnant and attention to popular education really declined. It was what we should call to-day "a material age."

Such as it was, however, Brookline felt the effects of it in a way that now seems strange. Its population grew somewhat, but the increase was in a class of people for which the town had not been noted. The "Poor Little Town" of 1700 was in 1800 coming to be what we are told with so wearisome iteration that it is to-day, the richest town in the country. The newcomers were no longer farmers, but men of wealth and social prominence, who came to build summer residences on the hills of a town fully four miles away from their winter homes. The men of science who are on the watch for wonderful changes of climate should take account of the singular fact that spots once sought in this town for their coolness in summer are now forsaken by the end of June, the old residences either standing vacant or replaced by winter residences into which no one ventures till October, while the owners explain to you on the piazzas of the North Shore or the deck of the ocean steamer, that "Brookline, you know, is such a hot place in summer."

At the opening of the nineteenth century, therefore, the town grew in wealth and in refinement very fast. The parish felt the change, and the building of its new meeting-house, in 1806, was one of its effects. The

contrast between it and the little old building down the street was typical of the altered circumstances of life in Brookline. Rebecca Boylston wrote to her uncle Edward in 1810, "Where the Meeting-house stood is now a cultivated garden, & the parsonage house handsomely fitted up. On the hill opposite the schoolhouse on the left hand going to our house there is an elegant meeting-house said by many to be the handsomest in the state, we are likewise blessed with a minister whom we all love & revere." Gifts came in from wealthy parishioners, a bell cast in London from the Hon. Stephen Higginson, a pulpit and pew-caps of cherrywood from his son, a handsome clock that still lifts its warning hands to the minister and softly reminds him of the hour of noon—from Mr. John Lucas, and other tokens of a prosperity such as by no means surrounded the former house at its building. Thirty singers, and an orchestra of instruments, some of which were fearfully and wonderfully made, and even more so played, added to the solemn pomp of the Sunday services. So the old parish reflected back to the town the prosperity of the new day.

With wealth comes culture, and with culture, especially on the seacoast, where intercourse with foreign lands broadens the mind, comes heresy. It was not strange, considering that Protestantism itself had its strongholds in maritime lands like England and Holland, that the Unitarian controversy should rise in eastern Massachusetts. It was a sad matter, with its rending of churches and its quarrels over ecclesiastical property. It would not happen to-day and it may yet be brought to an end. When the separation was fairly finished, it was found

that the older parishes, those which had stood out against Edwards and the itinerant preachers of eighty years before, remained in the hands of the Unitarians. The First Parish in Brookline was not an exception to this general rule, but it was an exception to the fierce disputes and open divisions which were so common. One may read the old records from 1800 to 1820 and never suspect the change which had come over the belief and the affiliation of the parish. This was due largely to the gentle wisdom with which Dr. Pierce steered the good ship through the rapids of that turbulent period. Those who withdrew did so as individuals. Other churches were formed in the town and in them those who were not yet ready to change the old ways of thinking found a more congenial atmosphere. As for those who remained, they, like multitudes of thoughtful people in New England at that time, found that they were ripe for the change, and that it had been going on in the parish for two generations. James Allen and Joseph Jackson had unconsciously, by omitting the old dogmas from their sermons, educated their congregation for the coming day, and now that the day had come, Dr. Pierce simply kept quiet about the controverted doctrines while the former things fell away like the leaves in October. I once asked Dr. George Putnam what he did during the Parker controversy, and he answered, with a twinkle in his eyes, "O, I kept on telling my people not to get drunk and not to beat their wives." Dr. Pierce also probably preached practical sermons, "which nobody could deny," and by refusing to quarrel over things that no one could find out, led his people safely through the Red Sea of theological

uproar to the Promised Land on the other side. "There is no real substitute for wisdom," said Mr. Joshua Billings, "but silence comes mighty nigh it."

But the golden age of New England religion was over. The unity of faith was broken and one church could hold neither the growing population nor the diverging creeds. In 1828 another church was organized in the town, and all the main sects of the day had their representatives, who found church homes in neighboring towns. The Puritan ideal of a community united in faith, with one flock and one shepherd,—was impracticable, and the identity of church and state, already broken as to the suffrage, was plainly unjust as to taxation. That citizens should be compelled to support a faith which they did not hold and might dislike was a law which could not continue. For a while those who could prove that they supported some other church were excused from helping to support the town parish, but in 1833 a law was passed making all parishes independent. The Established Church of Massachusetts came to an end. Over twenty years earlier the same fate had come to the Congregational Churches of Connecticut, which never had been divided by heresy. Dr. Lyman Beecher, in his diary, has told us how hard they fought against the change. "It was a time of great depression and suffering. . . . It was as dark a day as I ever saw. . . . The injury to the cause of Christ, as we then supposed, was irreparable. For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their

own resources and on God. . . . By voluntary efforts, societies, missions and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than they ever could by queues, and shoe-buckles and cocked hats, and gold-headed canes." This has proved to be true of the whole country. It is the only land which has not an established church, and which keeps the hands of the state off religion and the hands of religion out of the public purse, yet it is the land where religion, with all its divisions and failings, is more alive than anywhere else.

For a while this was not true of this parish, but for reasons external to itself. The population of the town increased only on one side. The southern half remains to-day almost as thinly settled as it was a hundred years ago, while the northern half has become almost crowded. The First Parish, as it was named after it became independent in 1834, seemed likely to share the fate of the old churches of the hill-towns, and to be left high and dry by the receding tide of the day's life. The large meeting-house of 1806 was replaced by a smaller one, holding only two-thirds as many people for various reasons, inability to heat it, the weakness of the new minister's voice, the loss of members to the new churches, the change in the distribution of the population. The church for the whole town gave way to the conventicle of a sect, and, though the congregation remained as cultivated as before, it was not so large. The new parish like the old continued to mirror the conditions of its day. The congregation of all sorts and conditions of men was changed to a typical Unitarian society, intensified by the high social character of the immediate neigh-

borhood. Probably there were few gatherings in New England or even in the country of so high an average of intelligence and social standing as that which faced Dr. Hedge from 1856 to 1872, and his successor, Mr. Brown, for many years after. The growing population of the other half of the town drew the thoughts of many in that direction, and serious attempts were made to remove the meeting-house from the geographical centre nearer to the centre of population, but in the last twenty years the new life seems to be forcing its way to the north, and the new church seems prophetic of a new prosperity. The Chairman of the Parish Committee reported at the close of the last year "the fact that we have had the largest receipts from pew rents this year of any year in our history," and the prosperity of the parish may be said to reflect to the extent of its ability the increase of the population of the town. A wise foresight will consider how far and in what way the parish may be made to mirror still the changing conditions of Brookline life.

Brookline has been a famous town and the Parish has exemplified in its membership that which made it famous. The life around it a quarter of a century ago was almost idyllic, a life of wealth and culture, of independence and individuality, yet one of sincerity and simplicity. It may have been a little regardless of the difficulties and needs of the mass of mankind and somewhat limited in its human sympathies, but in its high intelligence, its sensible use of large means, the purity of its pleasures, the cleanness of its life and its high standard of honor, its lack of ostentation and its hatred of all cant and pre-

tence, it was a life to be praised. Probably no neighborhood could grow so much individuality to the square foot. It was the resort of the earlier transcendentalist and of the later mugwump, and the despair of the partisan of every kind. If I could read from the death roll, or from some of the faces still before me the names of the jurists and bankers, the architects and public servants and of men of high honor in many places and professions, any one acquainted with the life of Massachusetts would realize how exceptional has been the constituency of this parish and the opportunity which its ministers have had of influencing the world, not by building up an organization alone, but by spreading their ideals and convictions abroad through the life and work of such men and of corresponding women.

We are told that this town is rapidly changing. If it is, all the churches, and this one most of all, will change with it. But if you read its records, you will find this an old story. For fifty years this has been said, and with every change of ministers said with ludicrous misgiving. A Puritan parish will always have its mission to its time, for the Puritan spirit is one that never can cease to be needed. The Puritan parish may not be true to its opportunity, but its opportunity will still open before it.

If we ask what the dangers are that beset a town of the noble character which this town has had, we find the chief ones are two.

The first danger is that the sense of civic responsibility will be lost. The sensitiveness of each citizen to his duty as an individual to seek unselfishly the welfare of the community may decay. Indeed, this danger is already

upon us. Partly from absorption in the pursuit of gain and eagerness to seize the opportunities for personal advancement which this country and this age seem peculiarly to offer, or from a decline in the general conscience,—whatever the reason, there seems to be an increasing number of those to whom Brookline means a place to get something out of, not a body politic which it is a duty and a privilege to give something to. There are more than there ought to be to whom the town form of government and the freedom and openness of town meeting seem not to mean very much, and who simply get what they can and give only what they cannot help giving, who use its schools and police and are not even citizens in return, who have loud opinions about the conduct of public affairs but contribute not even a poll-tax. There is need, as there used not to be to the same extent, of the sense of individual responsibility for the public welfare.

The other danger is that of bringing party considerations, relating only to national or even state affairs, into the management of the affairs of the town. Parties there must be, for every idea has a right to an organized support. The political party has as much right to be as the religious sect. But to elect to town offices or to manage town affairs, with reference not to town welfare but to issues in other spheres, is to bring into town life first insincerity and finally dishonesty. Brookline has been known not only here, but of late, through a remarkable article in an English periodical, is now known abroad, as a town of exceptional purity and wisdom in the management of its affairs. This has been because the conflict

in town meeting has not been between parties but between individuals, and has been settled, not by political intrigues but by open discussion and personal conviction. This is freedom. This is true civic liberty, for each man to form his own opinion and act upon it without fear of a party despotism over him.

Such are the two dangers which threaten this and every other true town. What has the Puritan parish to set against them?

Precisely the two principles for which the Puritan has always stood, the responsibility of the individual directly to his God and the liberty of every man to form his own opinion and direct his own conduct. The Puritan's idea of religion was that of direct intercourse between his soul and God's spirit. As he prayed or read the Scriptures, all priestly and ecclesiastical authority floated away like the clouds, and left the individual face to face with the sunshine from above. He was free from any one's control or any organization's control, and because he was free he was under responsibility for what he did with his freedom. This made the Puritan a strong and an honest man,—often narrow and arrogant, but virile and sincere. This made the Puritan's civilization, in England, Scotland, Holland or New England,—little countries all of them—the source of liberty and power over wide areas of the best lands in the world. This made our New England towns what they have been, and it will keep them so while it lives. The best town life that ever was grew up around the Puritan meeting-houses. The moral of the story of this commonwealth is that though the outward union of Church and State

may not be possible to-day, yet the inward union always exists, and that to have a state of freemen we must have a church of freemen.

So we anticipate the Thanksgiving Proclamation and cry

"God save the Commonwealth of Massachusetts."